

## **Older Americans Act FAQs**

### **What is the Older Americans Act?**

The Older Americans Act (OAA) was first enacted in 1965 out of concern for the health and well being of America's older adults. It established the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA), with the intent of expanding opportunities for improving the health and enriching the lives of American citizens as they reach their later years.

In addition to creating the AoA, the law authorized grants to States for community planning and services programs, as well as for research, demonstration and training projects in the field of aging. Later amendments to the Act added grants to Area Agencies on Aging for local needs identification, planning, and funding of services, including but not limited to nutrition programs in the community as well as for those who are homebound; programs which serve Native American elders; services targeted at low-income minority elders; health promotion and disease prevention activities; in-home services for frail older adults, and services to protect the rights of older persons. The most recent reauthorization included the National Family Caregiver Support Program, a new programs aimed at helping family members who struggle to care for their older loved ones who are ill or disabled.

OAA has been reauthorized approximately every five years. The current law expires September 30, 2005.

### **What activities and services are covered by the Act?**

#### *Title I*

Introduces the purposes and goals on which the OAA policies and programs are based, includes definitions relevant to understanding the OAA's purposes and includes administering structures.

#### *Title II*

Establishes the Administration on Aging within the Department of Health and Human Services under the direction of an Assistant Secretary for Aging who is appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

#### *Title III*

Lays out responsibilities and requirements for State Units on Aging (SUA) and Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). As the largest component under OAA, includes programs and structures established through which most of the money is authorized and legislative detail is found. The Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP) is in Part A under General Provisions.

- Part B lays out supportive services and senior centers, including general health and mental health services, transportation, information and assistance, housing, long-term care, legal assistance, services to encourage employment of older workers and crime prevention
- Part C includes the congregate and home-delivered meals. Programs under this section must serve at least one hot, cold, frozen, dried, canned or supplemental food meal per day, five or more days a week except in a rural area where such frequency is not feasible.
- Part D consists of the disease prevention and health promotion provisions. SUAs are required to provide disease prevention and health promotion services and information at senior centers, meal sites and other appropriate locations.
- Part E establishes the National Family Caregiver Support Program, which calls for states, working in partnership with AAAs and local community service providers, to have five

basic services for family caregivers. These services are information; assistance in gaining access to supportive services, individual counseling, support groups and training to assist in making decisions and solving caregiving-related problems; respite care; and, limited supplemental services to complement care provided by family members.

*Title IV*

Awards competitive grants or cooperative agreements to eligible public or private non-profit agencies, organizations and institutions, including SUAs and AAAs, that represent and/or serve older people and their caregivers.

*Title V*

Administered by the Department of Labor, fosters and promotes useful part-time opportunities in community service activities for unemployed, low-income persons who are age 55 or older with poor employment prospects.

*Title VI*

Provides grants for Native American programs and is the focal point of advocacy on behalf of older adults who are Indians, Alaska Natives or Native Hawaiians. Includes supportive and nutritional services comparable to those under *Title III* that are provided in a manner that preserves and restores their dignity, self-respect and cultural identities.

*Title VII*

Provides allotments for Elder Rights Protection activities to protect and enhance the basic rights and benefits of vulnerable older people, or individuals who may need advocacy on their behalf because their physical or mental disabilities, social isolation, limited educational attainment or limited financial resources prevent them from being able to protect or advocate for themselves.

**What happens when the Act expires?**

Because the Older Americans Act expires on September 30, 2005, it will need to be reauthorized. An authorization is a legislative action establishing a program and general amounts of money to fund the program. Authorizations are the prerequisite for an appropriation or other kind of budget authority.

Congress has three choices: reauthorize the OAA by September 30, 2005; continue to fund OAA beyond September 30 if an agreement cannot be reached by September 30; or, let the law expire and the programs cease.

The Administration and Congress are both expected to support reauthorization of OAA, but it is unclear whether it will happen in 2005 or be delayed until after the White House Conference on Aging in October.

**American Dietetic Association's position:** Millions of older Americans would benefit from nutrition services if they were more broadly available, and participants and caretakers of older adults served by Older Americans Act programs, if necessary, should have access to meals, nutrition screening, nutrition education and counseling by a registered dietitian. Members of Congress are being asked to support and fund amendments to the current OAA that increase participant access to nutrition screening, education and counseling, and ensure qualified nutrition expertise is utilized in the coordination and planning of meal services.